

Lions in the Littoral - Leadership on Risk's Edge

By Jeff Kline and Bo Wallander



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Lions in the Littoral Leadership on Risk's Edge

As U.S. Navy forces focus on littoral operations, there is a need to explore force structure and capabilities that address operations in the global littorals with and without support of traditional blue water force structure from the U.S. Navy's key naval partners. This Navy force, optimized for littoral operations will act independently within the complex littoral zone and against sophisticated threats and it will act as a force multiplier in the application of traditional blue water capabilities adjacent to the littorals.

To address the littoral battle space—broadly defined as the region where land and ocean meet—in all regards, a Littoral Operations Center (LOC) was established at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in California in November 15, 2012. The center is organized under the Department for Defense Analyses.

The Swedish Armed Forces serve a national defense concept largely based on Littoral Operations. The long coast-line and the Baltic Sea have through history been a natural defense line against attacking enemies. The U.S. Navy has invited the Swedish Navy and Saab AB as the first foreign contributors to the different LOC activities comprising, lecturing, studies, workshops, war gaming and R&D projects. Saab AB and NPS has signed a CRADA (Cooperative Research and Development Agreement) to enable upcoming activities.

In the following essay, Capt. Jeff Kline, USN (Ret) and Capt. Bo Wallander, RSwn (Ret), describe leadership on risk's edge and is called "Lions in the Littorals." The essay takes an historical view over how bold leadership has been conducted over the course of time and gives some interesting conclusions to reflect on, also in modern warfare.

Lions in the Littorals

“All commanders are expected to accept prudent risk and allow the same of their subordinates. ... Action with risk is often better than inaction with no risk.” Admiral M. G. Mullen, Navy Strategic Plan, May 2006¹

“Given the same amount of intelligence, timidity will do a thousand times more damage in war than audacity” Carl Von Clausewitz, On War²

“Audaces fortuna iuvat” (Fortune favors the bold). Virgil, The Aeneid

What is audacity? A dictionary uses flattering words such as intrepid (characterized by fearlessness, fortitude, and endurance), daring, originality and verve (specialized ability or talent); along side these, less complementary such as “recklessly bold.” Many times which meaning a user implies depends on the final outcome of an audacious event—successful bold actions are daring and original; unsuccessful bold actions tend to be reckless.

There is an axiom that risk is commensurate with reward. In the examples provided here of action in the chaotic, confused and confined littoral maritime environment, success favors the audacious—audacity favoring lethal, offensive action.

On May 5, 1801, Lieutenant Thomas Cochrane’s HMS *Speedy*, a 158-ton brig of 14 4-pound guns, was pursuing a Spanish gunboat near Barcelona as part of a successful littoral campaign against Napoleon’s ally.³ From behind a fishing boat cluster appeared the Spanish frigate *Gamo*, a much larger and faster ship

with 32 guns (22 were 12-pounders) and a crew nearly six times that of *Speedy*. As Robert Harvey relates in his book *Cochrane, The Life and Exploits of a Fighting Captain*, young Lieutenant Cochrane had three choices: run and probably be caught, surrender to the more powerful ship, or close and fight.⁴ Cochrane chose to close and fight.

Hoisting false American colors and closing *Gamo*, Cochrane caused his opponent to hesitate, thereby giving himself time to reposition before revealing his true British flag. Using *Speedy*’s superior maneuverability and timing the *Gamo*’s rolls, Cochrane first placed his smaller ship on *Gamo*’s leeward side, causing the downward pointing Spanish guns to fire short. Next, as *Gamo* rolled up and gun crews reloaded, Cochrane closed to place *Speedy* under *Gamo*’s guns causing her next broadside to fire overhead. Cochrane responded with a grape shot from his elevated 4-pounders killing *Gamo*’s Captain de Torres. Over the next hour Cochrane maneuvered his ship to keep enough distance to prevent Spanish Marines from boarding but close enough to prevent *Gamo*’s great guns from delivering a broadside. While maintaining this close “safe zone,” he kept firing his own

1. Navy Strategic Plan in Support of Program Objective Memorandum 08, May 2008 p 21

2. *On War*, Carl Von Clausewitz, Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton, New Jersey, 1974, p 191

3. Lord Thomas Cochrane is the real life officer behind Patrick O’Brien’s popular Jack Aubrey series of Napoleonic novels.

4. *Cochrane, The Life and Exploits of a Fighting Captain*, Robert Harvey, Carroll & Graff New York, 2000

guns upward on the enemy's main deck. Finally, Cochrane ordered his crew into two boarding parties, one to cross on the bow and the other on *Gamo's* amidships. Save the ship's doctor to handle *Speedy's* helm, Cochrane committed his entire crew in the boarding effort. In the mêlée that followed, a combination of having one of his crew strike the Spanish colors, loudly calling for "more men" from *Speedy*, and having already killed the Captain, Cochrane created such a chaotic and dispiriting situation for the Spanish that they surrendered, over 300 men to 50 British Tars.

How did Cochrane succeed in this impossible situation? Was it luck? Robert Harvey's view is more comprehensive. He asserts Cochrane rapidly assessed his risk of almost certainly losing a chase if he ran away compared to matching his ship, crew, and own capabilities in a close fight. Flawless execution of an emerging plan modified with changing circumstances was a key factor.

For Cochrane to make this judgment and execute his tactical plan required him to know both his ship and his crew, fully appreciating the supreme trust they had in him and themselves. Of course, a bit of deception helped too. Thomas Cochrane was 25 years old.

In 1942 Lieutenant John D. Bulkeley was just 30 years old when he commanded Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron 3 in a desperate contest for Philippine littoral waters against the invading Japanese. Best known for effecting General MacArthur's escape from Corregidor, Bulkeley's months-long fight with the Japanese Navy was no less daring.

In his biography *Sea Wolf*, author William Breuer relates a particular night battle that reflects Bulkeley's daring, cha-

risma, and leadership.⁵ Pre-dawn January 23, a tired PT34 crew was returning to base with a wounded man after a battle in Subic Bay had resulted in the sinking of a motorized Japanese barge. John Bulkeley was embarked. Coming across another heavily plated Japanese vessel on the way in, Bulkeley asked his crew if they wished to attack. To a man—including the wounded one—the response was yes. PT34 closed to engage. Continuous small arms fire had little effect on the enemy vessel's plating until a round struck a fuel tank. The resulting explosion caused the Japanese vessel's engines to go quiet, setting it adrift.

Lieutenant Bulkeley ordered the PT boat to lay alongside, threw hand grenades inside the Japanese vessel, and leapt aboard-- no doubt confident of the men's support behind him. As Breuer relates, Bulkeley took three Japanese prisoners and collected various documents before the craft sunk. This style of close in maritime fighting was the norm for Bulkeley and his men.

Close-in fighting was also the style of William B. Cushing. In April 1863 at age 21 he was Captain of *Commodore Barney*, a 500 ton armed steamer, charged with leading a fire support flotilla in support of Union forces off Suffolk, Virginia. The day after four Union sailors had been taken prisoner and one killed when responding to what they believed to be a flag of truce from the bank, Cushing personally lead a landing party in reprisal and to conduct reconnaissance. He took a twelve-pound howitzer and ninety men ashore and advanced to Chuckatuck, Virginia where he believed Confederate troops to be stationed. En route he com-

5. *Sea Wolf, A Biography of John D. Bulkeley, USN*, William B. Breuer, Presido Press, 1989

mandeered a team of mules and a cart from a disgruntled farmer. Loading the ammunition in the cart and hitching the howitzer to the team, Cushing ordered the advance on the town. Prior to entering Chuckatuck, however, he divided his force leaving half at a crossroads to set up a possible ambush.⁶ With his remaining forty sailors he entered the town's street and met a like number of mounted Confederate cavalry preparing to charge his shore party. The howitzer was quickly readied but in haste its round fired over the charging cavalry's heads. The loud report, however, spooked the battle-novice mules who promptly bolted directly at the Confederate force with ammunition cart in tow. Seeing his ammunition "jumping ship", and facing the danger of his sailors being cut down by the Confederates, Cushing capitalized on the confusing moment and ordered his men to charge. In his own words, "If mules can charge cavalry, sailors are braver than mules!"⁷ The mounted troops, seeing mules, a cart, and forty sailors on foot charging them broke and fled, leaving their dead, several horses, and the town of Chuckatuck under the U.S. Navy's command.⁸

Bold, aggressive, and audacious, these three examples can be complimented by

many historical illustrations in which young naval officers thought and fought with tactical acumen. Cochrane's later Battle of Aix Roads, Bulkeley's night reconnaissance of Normandy's beaches, and Cushing's more famous boat attack against the Confederate armored ship *Albatross* are three more triumphs from these littoral lions. There are common threads in these actions that illuminate leadership lessons for our modern littoral and riverine forces. And, as the United States builds forces designed to once again fight in this environment, it needs to prepare naval officers to assume greater tactical responsibility sooner than our capital ship-intensive force has traditionally allowed.

In the navies of allies and friends we find a rich heritage of courage, daring and fearlessness in the littorals. We can learn many lessons from their "littoral lions" of naval warfare who have demonstrated strong leadership, innovation, fortitude and endurance—qualities that were as important then as they are today.

Some of these examples are part of naval history dating many centuries back when technology enabled bold action. For example, the Romans were better soldiers than sailors. To overcome their weakness and exploit their strength, they developed the *corvus*, a device to hold their ships fast to an opponent's and allow their soldiers to cross over to the enemy vessels where they could defeat their enemy.

Likewise, the Baltic Sea in northern Europe is a place where many historic naval battles have been fought throughout the centuries between nations such as Sweden (including Finland), Denmark and Russia. The vast archipelagoes on the Swedish and Finnish side of the Baltic

6. *Lincoln's Commando, The Biography of Commander W.B. Cushing, U.S.N.*, Roske and Van Doren, Harper Brothers, New York, 1957

7. William B. Cushing's personal diary of the event.

8. An interesting follow up to this event is told by Roske and Van Doren in *Lincoln's Command*. Cushing abandoned Chuckatuck fearing an overwhelming counter attack. Several hours later, Confederate General Pickett rode into town alone to pay a call on Lasalle Corbell, his "charming Sally". Had Cushing remained, or arrived later, General Pickett may not have been available to participate in the Gettysburg battle.

have for ages constituted good protection for the Swedish naval forces while challenging adversaries. Near Stockholm alone one can count over 30,000 islands.

For centuries, the Swedish Navy and its lions have taken advantage of this “extreme littoral” environment. During the Great Northern War (1700–1721), Sweden and Russia engaged in many naval battles conducted predominately in the archipelagoes of Åland and Åboland and in the Gulf of Finland. One particular engagement highlights knowledge and understanding of the environment, as well as real skill and daring tested in battle between a Swedish flotilla and much bigger Russian fleet.

During the 1714 battle of Hangö Udd, a 34-year old Shoutbynacht (rear admiral) Nils Ehrensköld, had taken a position at the Bengtsårfjärden (narrow coastal inlet) with a small detachment of seven canon barges inside the Hangö archipelago, with very narrow waters and few escape routes. The Russian admiral, Fjodor Apraksin, with his fleet of 35 galleys, encouraged Ehrensköld to surrender, but Ehrensköld refused and was consequently attacked by the Russians. Ehrensköld’s small flotilla managed however to force the Russians to retreat promptly after the second salvo. The Russians then detached 80 fresh galleys with fully rested crews to fight the small Swedish flotilla. There were larger Swedish ships of the line in the vicinity of Ehrensköld’s flotilla, but they were unable to intervene due to their deeper draft.

It was gallant but bloody battle. Ehrensköld’s small force was overwhelmed by the numerically superior Russians. Out of the force of 20,000 Russians, 3,000 were killed with many more wounded. 300 Swedes out of 900 were killed

and the rest were captured. But it was not a true victory for the Russian side—only 25 galleys were still operative after the fight and 115 were put out of action. Apraksin’s superior force was effectively repelled. For the Swedish Navy, it was a successful defense against a numerically superior force, and the Swedish bravery at Hangö Udd stopped the Russian’s advancement to the Swedish coastline. Ehrensköld was wounded and captured but found great respect and goodwill from Tsar Peter the Great. Ehrensköld was promoted to Vice Admiral 1716 and was released 1721. Ehrensköld is regarded as one of the great sea heroes in the Swedish navy – a lion of the Swedish littoral - and a destroyer was named after him in 1926. The Russian navy commemorated their victory by naming a ship “Gangut” (the Russian word for Hangö).

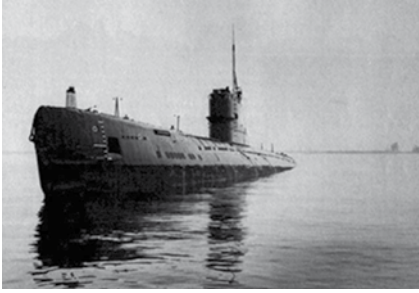
In Ehrensköld’s example, boldness, aggressiveness and audacity were required. But knowledge of his operating environment was also a key factor. Today, modern naval warfare requires mastery of technological to augment audacity. Boldness and aggressiveness are critical to victory, but knowledge and the proper use of technology will deliver the win. The choices made in the development of naval warfighting techniques must be anchored in the physical environment in which the technology will be employed while serving the concepts of operations and addressing the threats. Nowhere do these elements converge more acutely than in the near shore. Ehrensköld’s force fought a surface battle, but today’s engagement involves air, undersea, ground, space and cyber as well, and the technology has to be adapted with a keen sense for the specific—and often rapidly shifting—anomalies present in specific littoral regions.



Hangö Udd and the battle depicted above.

During the Cold War, the Swedish Navy learned that many afloat sensors and weapon systems were solely designed for blue water operations and not for the littoral or near shore operations of existential interest for the Swedish Navy. In October, 1981, the Soviet “Whiskey class” submarine, commonly but erroneously known as “U 137”, ran aground

inside the Karlskrona archipelago, a short distance from Karlskrona naval base. The incident is remembered as the “Whiskey on the Rocks.” It was a wakeup call. After that incident, Sweden became aware of numerous submarine intrusions in its territorial waters over more than a decade. A program was instituted to develop the technology needed to improve



Soviet Union Navy submarine "U137" aground in the Swedish Archipelago 1981, ("Whiskey on the rocks").

Sweden's anti-submarine warfare capability. A joint ASW task force was established and the Navy conducted local ASW war fighting to protect the Swedish sea border and prevent unwanted incursion into its territorial waters. It became obvious that the specific environmental conditions that exist in the littorals put severe restrictions and limitations on the use of many sensor and weapon systems. Existing systems had not been designed to handle the clutter, shallow waters and ducting phenomena that are peculiar to that particular environment. To overcome these problems, a national research program was started and Sweden developed its own technology as well as harnessing foreign technology bringing about a vastly improved proficiency if not expertise in littoral ASW operations.

Evidence of Sweden evolving as a leader in littoral ASW came when the U.S. Navy sought to integrate a Swedish *Gotland* class submarine directly into its fleet operational experimentation and training by bringing it from the Baltic to San Diego from 2005 to 2007.

The common leadership threads above are youth combined with boldness, a keen sense of risk assessment grounded

in technical and tactical knowledge, and enthusiastic leadership.

All are three of one piece, but must be addressed separately. Let's deal with youth first.

Historically, most riverine and littoral warfare tends to be tactical in nature relying on smaller platforms and hence junior commanders. Most junior maritime commanders are neither risk-averse nor timid. Compared with traditional career paths on larger ships accepting "early" command carries early career risk compared to a more traditional path on larger ships. By contrast, most senior commanders become more risk conservative as their scope of experience, knowledge and responsibility increase. Clausewitz recognized this phenomenon in the Army "The power of the various emotions is sharply reduced by the intervention of lucid thought, and, more, by self control. Consequently, boldness grows less common in the higher ranks. Even if growth of an officer's perception and intelligence does not keep pace with his rise in rank, the realities of war will impose their conditions and concerns."⁹

This is a healthy framework for a Navy concerned both with obtaining near-shore access and maintaining blue-water sea line communications. Littoral and in-shore warfare tends to be tactical in nature, employing smaller platforms where a high risk tolerance is necessary for success. Control of blue-water communications tends to be strategic in nature relying on capital ships where risk must be mitigated to prevent losing critical logistics through the loss of a fleet. In other words, an audacious lieutenant risks his ship and maybe a particular battle. An

9. *On War*, p 191

overly audacious fleet commander risks the fleet and the security of strategic communications for a nation. It is good that fleet commanders temper their boldness. The lesson for littoral forces is simple: assign younger officers to command littoral and inshore forces. Prepare them with an appreciation historical littoral operations and a professional knowledge of the littoral environment in order to best apply their men and systems.

Risk-aggressive youth, however, must be tempered with the second leadership element: keen technical and tactical knowledge. The difference between a reckless action and a high risk venture is usually a sound plan. Cochrane's engagement of *Gamo* was founded upon superb knowledge of *Speedy's* sailing characteristics, his crew's capabilities, the environment, and *Gamo's* limitations. Ehrensköld knew his environment and leveraged that knowledge to force the Russians into a Pyrrhic victory. One could argue Bulkeley's and Cushing's actions above were too bold based solely on the situations. But having trained the men they commanded, both men knew with confidence how they could be expected to perform in a crisis situation. This knowledge was born from both officers' personal familiarity with each member of their crew and is endemic to life aboard small combatant vessels. Roske and Van Doren summarized this best by quoting the Union's Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells who wrote of Cushing:

"Many who knew him not personally, and some who did, fail to appreciate his extraordinary traits of character, and impute his acts of heroic daring to wild and inconsiderate recklessness, but there was in his dashing exploits, not only audacity and intrepid cou-

rage, but wonderful sagacity and prudence. Projects which most persons deemed wild and inconsiderate will be found on investigation to have been deliberate and well planned designs, and the results, whether in overcoming or putting to flight superior numbers, naval and military, in lower Virginia, hazardous enterprises in the sounds and rivers of North Carolina, or in the destruction of the ironclad steamer *Albermarle*, demonstrate the wisdom and intelligence which prompted, no less than the courage of the young officer in every instance"¹⁰

"Deliberate well planned designs" of high risk ventures is a page directly from the special warfare culture. Highly trained in their equipment and operating environments, SEALs, Rangers, Army and Air Force Special Warfare units provide a template for preparing junior surface officers to assume littoral and riverine responsibilities. Of course, Admiral Arleigh Burke's direction to the crew of *USS Arleigh Burke*—"This ship is built to fight. You had better know how"—is good advice for sailors everywhere, but for the unique near and in shore environment, sailors must learn both maritime and land environment considerations. Dedicated time is required to prepare Navy officers to operate in this unique environment and gain the technical and tactical knowledge needed to make quick risk assessments in tactical situations. Sufficient career time is needed to develop as a warfare expert, to work with crews, and to develop leadership skills in the near shore environment. The proximity to land also means much more combat capability can be brought to bear at

10. *Lincoln's Commando*, p 300

sea, such as shore batteries, shore based air, and swarms of fast attack craft. Capt. Wayne Hughes, author of *Fleet Tactics and Coastal Combat* (published by the Naval Institute Press), says “Perhaps the navies of the world should no longer refer to ‘naval’ tactics at all. It is more reasonable to think in terms of ‘littoral tactics that include warships.’” Our littoral lions operating in the environment must have a working knowledge of the land force’s influence on near shore operations.

This warrants a distinct career path, not just the past’s “one tour in small ships” model the U.S. Navy’s surface community has tolerated. A typical littoral career progression may be two tours in riverine forces followed by two tours and command of LCS, with Riverine and LCS Squadron command the pinnacle. This is also an argument why the Navy needs to maintain a small ship and boat contingent continuously vice simply building them on demand. The core of a tactically proficient manpower force must be continuously maintained to meet rapidly emiring requirements.

Most important, the littoral lions’ final trait is enthusiastic leadership. This is the least challenging objective to meet. The United States and Swedish surface Navy is filled with junior officers thirsting to match their capabilities to the challenges of early command and tactical responsibility. They should be encouraged to step into the new littoral and riverine navies, assured of career path recognized and supported by the surface Navy. They should also be inspired to dare brilliantly. Recognizing intelligent failures can foster growth, we cannot but gain better leaders for the corporate risks taken in their development. Intelligent and inspired “self-starters” should actively be

sought among our midshipman, recruited to begin filling the entry-level positions for our riverine and smaller combatants. They will form the core leadership to create the Navy’s credible maritime security and inshore mission capability. Within these ranks, a future audacious Ehrensköld, Cochrane, Bulkeley, or Cushing will win the littoral and rivers for our navies.

So, it will be with the future “Lions of the littorals” as it was with those legends from the past..

The corvus that allowed the daring boarding parties of the past to cross deck and fight have given way to the missiles and lasers that will allow future, skilled littoral warriors to duel and win. This will be where the audacious triumph over the timid – this will be an endeavor of boldness and daring best left to the youthful in spirit.

Even navies with unique maritime homeland defense environments must also be capable in blue water, and able to deploy globally in support of multinational coalitions. With all the knowledge we have today it must be obvious that all systems onboard have to be both littoral and blue water proficient, especially with the awareness that an overwhelmingly part of all naval battles in the world have been conducted in the littorals or near shore.

Strong requirements have to be put on sensor and weapon systems in order to handle the very complex operational environment and short reaction times in the littorals. While a system proficient for the littorals will normally also be proficient for blue water operations, the opposite is not always the case.

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